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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000761

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [CD](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: THE GOS HARDLINE WILL SOON CHANGE, SAYS AL-TURABI

REF: A. KHARTOUM 423

[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 725

[1](#)C. KHARTOUM 727

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On May 18, Popular Congress Party leader Hassan al-Turabi told CDA Fernandez on May 18 that the Government of Sudan's (GoS) current hardline approach and rhetoric in the wake of the Omdurman attack is temporary. The GoS will soon change its tone and be open to negotiations with Khalil Ibrahim and JEM, especially as the regime is divided and weak, said al-Turabi. Tension between the SAF and NISS is high because of the attack. He added that the harassment, beating, and detention of young men from Darfur continues, and that JEM remains strong and could have inflicted more damage. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Dr. Hassan Abdalla al-Turabi is the founder and leader of the Peoples' Congress Party (PCP). Dr. al-Turabi was a founding member of the National Islamic Front (NIF), which led to the current regime, until he was forced out in the late 1990s when he tried to consolidate his own power in the regime. Many of his former proteges are now senior leaders in the NCP regime. It has long been rumored that Turabi is JEM's founding father with close and continuing ties to Ibrahim, who is also a former NIF member, an allegation that Turabi consistently denies. (reftel A).

TURABI'S DETENTION AND INTERROGATION

[1](#)3. (C) Al-Turabi opened the meeting by discussing his May 12 detention. He stated that "I knew on my way back from touring Sinnar that I would be detained" and shortly after his arrival in Khartoum, intelligence officers took him to Kobar prison. He stated that the Kobar prison had been cleared out of its old prisoners ("mostly Salafi Islamists") in anticipation of new detainees after Omdurman and that his interrogation lasted almost four hours. He said that intelligence agents were not able to produce any evidence linking him to the JEM attack, and that he refused to participate in the interrogation. The interrogation then quickly broke down, stated al-Turabi, and the interrogators started to "rehash the past" discussing attempted coups and attacks from the 1970's and 1980's.

ETHNIC DETENTIONS AND BEATINGS

[1](#)4. (C) Al-Turabi stated that three or four members of PCP originating from Darfur were still being held by Sudanese security. Most others detained after the JEM attack were released although there are still approximately twenty others who were previously detained on security charges unrelated to the Omdurman raid. Al-Turabi stated that these are strategic

detentions by the government as the detained individuals "have very strong attitudes against the Government." Al-Turabi also alleged that the Government has carried out random executions of Zaghawas and Furs in Khartoum, and CDA Fernandez said he had heard allegations such as this and asked for more proof (something Al-Turabi was not able to provide.) Al-Turabi said that the GoS has particularly targeted teenage laborers from Darfur working in Omdurman and studying at Quranic schools. He said that the government realizes that most of the detained do not have any link to the attacks, but that after the GoS beats and detains these individuals, it does not know what to do with them. He stated that his own cook, a native of Darfur, was detained and beaten twice while traveling back and forth to Omdurman. "If they knew whose cook he was, they would have beaten him even more," he laughed.

SYMPATHETIC READING OF JEM ATTACK

15. (C) Al-Turabi stated that JEM could have done a lot more damage given the number of their fighters, the size of their arsenal, and their proximity to Khartoum. He said that the JEM fighters "were so gentle with the people of Omdurman," as they bought cigarettes, food, and water from shop keepers. He stated that JEM fighters took breaks from the fighting, praying at Omdurman's mosques, and that in general the fighters treated the general populace with great respect. "The JEM fighters were very quiet and were even welcomed by the people on the streets," said Al-Turabi. People took pictures of the popular welcome JEM received so there is actual evidence that this occurred. He added that some of the worse damage, such as to the Khalifa Mosque minaret was caused by inaccurate SAF tankfire.

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DIVISION IN THE REGIME'S RANKS

16. (C) According to al-Turabi, the Sudanese Army was not involved until very late in the JEM attack. He said that the Sudanese security apparatus did not share much information with the police, but that they, along with the intelligence forces, did the bulk of the fighting. Al-Turabi said he was surprised to see very few Army generals or lieutenants at the large government-organized demonstration on May 14 led by President Bashir. He stated that the same was true at the Government's "exhibition" of JEM weapons and vehicles in Omdurman on May 16. Tension between the military and the security/intelligence apparatus was at an all time high. CDA Fernandez asked Turabi whether he thought the GoS was weaker or stronger following the attack, and without hesitation, al-Turabi said that the government is undoubtedly in a weaker position. He said that the government is a military regime whose authority comes from the credibility of its security forces. Al-Turabi said that it is unlikely that the Minister of Defense will be removed, as he is close to Bashir. Al-Turabi also predicted that upcoming legislation on the National Security Act will be negatively impacted by the JEM attack, "they have an excuse now not to relax security".

HARDLINE FOR NOW, BUT THE GOS WILL NEGOTIATE AND NOT INVADE CHAD

17. (C) The hardliners have a lot of power right now, but that is for the short-term as the Government has reacted in fear, stated al-Turabi. They were scared and will look for a political way out where they can maximize their advantage in negotiation. As evidence of this, he stated that the families of senior GoS officials had booked all the flights out of Sudan during the crisis and that "the VIP room at the airport was not able to hold all of their wives and children." A GoS invasion of Chad is unlikely stated al-Turabi, as leading GoS officials realize that they have to talk to Khalil Ibrahim and Abdul Wahid." Al-Turabi stated that JEM remains a strong force with hundreds, not dozens, of vehicles

retreating back in good order to Darfur through Kordofan after the attack. He said JEM might attack again "to remind people that Darfur's problems have not gone away." Al-Turabi emphasized that despite GoS officials' saber-rattling and current statements rejecting negotiations with JEM, that "the government always makes up with those it demonizes." He stated that the GoS attempted to ostracize both John Garang and Sadiq Al-Mahdi, but the GoS eventually negotiated with both and entered into a partnership with these leaders. Al-Turabi stated that he was hopeful that "this shock will teach the NCP a lesson" and that "after a big show, the GoS will be ready to negotiate." Al-Turabi stated that the U.S. and the UK now carry weight with the GoS and that these two governments should use their influence to encourage the GoS to pursue non-military options.

COMMENT

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18. (C) Al-Turabi is right to highlight the ongoing detentions of the Fur and Zaghawa, not only due to the serious human rights violations, but also because the regime's current treatment of Western Sudanese will drive Darfuris even further from the regime and exacerbate the conflict. Al-Turabi appeared quite sympathetic to JEM throughout the meeting, describing the fighters as "gentle" "respectful" and even pious. While it is unlikely that he had a direct role in the attack, al-Turabi appeared to quietly savor the current crisis that many of his former colleagues have found themselves in. We hope that al-Turabi's prediction regarding a possible softening in the regime's stance is accurate, and we will continue to urge GoS officials to work towards a sustainable political solution for Darfur. Notably, al-Turabi neglected to mention that JEM, not the GoS, may require the most convincing to come to the negotiating table.

FERNANDEZ